



# COMMISSION ON PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

## **Fifteenth Session**

**Virtual Meeting, 16, 18 March and 1 April 2021**

**Update from the Sea Containers Task Force - Proposal for a Path Forward  
for the Sea Container Task Force**

**Agenda item 11.3**

**Prepared by Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States**

***English, French and Spanish***

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States wish to share with the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) and the Sea Container Task Force (SCTF) some perspectives and suggestions for a practical way forward with respect to sea container hygiene. Specifically, we request the SCTF to consider the strategic perspectives and suggestions laid out in this paper as it finalizes its deliberations and formulates recommendations for CPM consideration in 2022.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

2. In 2015, the CPM agreed on a five-year hiatus from pursuing the development of a global standard on sea containers. At the time, a number of contracting parties and several regions were not ready to adopt the draft ISPM. There were various operational, legal, and practical issues that exceeded national plant protection organization (NPPO) capacity and/or authority to implement a standard. Hence, it was agreed that at the five-year mark and based on SCTF analysis of the impact of the complimentary actions recommended by the CPM on reducing pest risks associated with sea containers, the CPM would consider the need for developing a standard. More recent concerns related to 'contaminant' and quarantine pest detections in containers continue to highlight the urgent need for a global solution.

3. The SCTF has made good progress in some areas, but other activities have become complex and have not been fully realized or completed. Covid measures have had an impact on this. Therefore,

with one year of work left, the SCTF should focus its efforts on how best to support decision-making at CPM-16. Through a more focused work plan for 2021, the SCTF can develop a report that: a) identifies key considerations for CPM; b) options for next steps; c) analysis of pros and cons of these options; and d) an outline of any suggested follow-up guidance documents. This approach for the SCTF will ensure that CPM members will be more fully informed and prepared in their decision-making.

### III. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SCTF

4. We believe, to the extent they are able, the SCTF should address some core questions which, depending on the answer, may help provide a stronger basis for planning the next steps going forward. These questions are:

- 1) What have been the main accomplishments that regions have seen over the past five years in their respective efforts to address the issue of pest risk associated with sea containers? What have the regions learned about what works and what does not?
- 2) What have we learned over these past five years about sea containers and the comparative level of risk they pose in terms of harboring and spreading pests? Is the situation better or worse than five years ago? What are CPM members' view and experience on this?
- 3) Is the industry using any part of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) container cleanliness code (i.e., IMO/ILO/UNECE Code of Practice for Packing Cargo Transport Units (CTU Code) to improve things? Are there any data on the level of uptake of the CTU Code over the last 5 years? What role does the CTU Code play in addressing NPPOs concerns with preventing the spread of pests? Does this CTU Code have any potential valuable role in the future from a phytosanitary standpoint?
- 4) What have we learned about the various industry components, logistics chain, and their willingness and capacity to partner with NPPOs in addressing the pest risk issue?
- 5) Given there are many players in the supply chain who can contribute to cleanliness, is there a need to consider additional guidelines and industry practices targeted at these various entities?
- 6) Do incentives work? Or do NPPOs and governments need to rely more on applying regulatory actions at their borders to reject shipments and force industry to alter its behavior?
- 7) What are the major constraints that may limit the success of an effective voluntary program which would induce the industry to increase the cleanliness of containers?
- 8) Is there any opportunity and value for alignment of specific activities that contracting parties should consider? Specifically, which are the points in the logistics chain which have the greatest potential value in terms of phytosanitary alignment?
- 9) What are the various activities or practices that could be implemented by contracting parties which is consistent with their operational capacity and national legislation, to achieve the common outcome of minimizing phytosanitary risk?
- 10) If we pursue the development of IPPC guidance on sea containers, what would be the most critical and essential elements that need to be addressed?
- 11) Should hosting an international workshop (or special CPM session) be considered aimed at exchanging regional lessons and experiences gained over these past five years, assessing the industry's role, evaluating the role of the IMO as a potential partner, and identifying the outstanding issues and critical elements? It would be important to hear the perspectives and experiences from the different regions.

5. During these past five years, it remains clear to most contracting parties that sea containers are indeed a pathway for pests and something we can no longer ignore. This concern has been recently reflected in the ongoing discussions about “contaminants” and other significant quarantine pest detections in containers.

6. Some countries appear ready to move forward to develop a standard. Other regions remain more hesitant and uncertain in the absence of information on what a standard may entail and their operational feasibility.

7. Hence, we believe a stepwise process going forward would create a stronger basis upon which to determine what a practical, operationally feasible, and acceptable approach may look like.

#### **IV. PROPOSAL**

8. We suggest that the SCTF consider a step-wise path forward which would entail the following:

- 1) The SCTF considers the core strategic questions laid out in this paper and address them to the extent they can prior to reporting back to CPM-16 in 2022.
- 2) The SCTF considers the concept of holding an international workshop (or special session) in late 2022 which would allow for: a) the discussion of the SCTF report; b) exchange of lessons learned, views, experiences, and recommendations among the regions; and c) the identification of the critical elements which need to be considered in any future solution including IPPC guidance.
- 3) The revision of the CPM Recommendation No. 6 on Sea Containers to reflect a more current and updated understanding of the sea container issues, including the development and incorporation of a code of good practices embedded in the Recommendation (this code of good practices may be the foundation of a standard). This updated Recommendation should take into account the outcomes and findings of the international workshop.
- 4) The development of any other recommended actions that CPM may wish to consider based on outcomes from the international workshop, consistent with the normal scope of IPPC and NPPO functions and mandates.
- 5) Developing a Terms of Reference for a Working Group to drive delivery of 2, 3, and 4 above, to be approved by CPM-16.

9. We look forward to the SCTF report and hope that this paper provides some helpful suggestions to this Task Force in its final year of deliberations, and in formulating its suggestions on how best to advance an aligned and practical approach on sea containers